

# NEWS AND NOTES FOR FLORIDA VETERANS

Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office  
St. Petersburg, FL

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The "News and Notes for Florida Veterans" is published monthly by the Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg, Florida, to provide information on VA benefit programs to veterans and dependents in Florida. The material presented does not have the effect of laws or regulations. Please send questions or comments on this newsletter to Veterans Service Center, ATTN: "News and Notes," PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731. We do not have the resources to maintain a mailing list for distribution to individuals; however this newsletter is available on the St. Petersburg VA Regional Office web site at [www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete](http://www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete).

**VA PAMPHLET 80-05-01 "FEDERAL BENEFITS FOR VETERANS AND DEPENDENTS 2005"** is available on-line at [http://www.va.gov/opa/vadocs/current\\_benefits.htm](http://www.va.gov/opa/vadocs/current_benefits.htm). Hard copies may be ordered from the U.S. Government Printing Office on-line at [bookstore.gpo.gov](http://bookstore.gpo.gov); or by calling 1-866-512-1800, or by mail from Superintendent of Documents, PO Box 371954, Pittsburgh PA 15250-7954. The cost for a single copy is \$7.00; a pack of 25 is \$67.00. Postage and handling are included.

**VA FORMS** can be downloaded from the new One-VA Forms Internet Site at <http://www.va.gov/vaforms/>.

**CASUALTY INFORMATION** VA has received requests for copies of the DD Forms 1300 (Reports of Casualty) VA receives from the military services under the VA Casualty Assistance Program, or other information that identifies Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) casualties. For example, a request was recently received from a State veterans affairs office for that State's casualties because a monument is being dedicated to those OEF/OIF servicepersons from that State who were casualties.

Because DD Form 1300 information includes the surviving spouse, children, and parents, Privacy restrictions do not allow VA to furnish DD Forms 1300 to non-VA parties. Further, VA cannot be responsible for accurate casualty information because the Department of Defense is the source of for that information, not VA.

DoD provides casualty identification information on an Internet site which can be accessed at: <http://www.dior.whs.mil/mmid/casualty/castop.htm>. Information is available at that site by OEF/OIF theaters, period of time, state of record, etc. The information is updated regularly.

**HI-LITES OF CHANGES MADE BY THE VETERANS BENEFITS IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 2004 (PUBLIC LAW 108-454)** On December 10, 2004, the President signed the Veterans Benefits Improvement Act of 2004 (the Act). This Act amends title 38 of the United States Code in several significant ways.

The Dependents Educational Assistance (Chapter 35) delimiting date for surviving spouses of service members who die on active duty is extended from 10 years to 20 years from the eligibility date.

A new transitional benefit of \$250.00 monthly to a surviving spouse who receives Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) and has one or more children below the age of 18 is added. The benefit is paid in addition to any other DIC payable under chapter 13 of title 38, United States Code. Only one \$250 per month add-on is payable regardless of the number of minor children. The increased rate applies only to months "occurring" during the two-year period beginning on the date entitlement to DIC began. It ceases on the first month beginning after the expiration of the two-year period or the month in which all of the surviving spouse's children have attained the age of 18, or are removed from the award, whichever is earliest.

The lump-sum proceeds of a veteran's life insurance policy is added to the list of payments that do not count as income for purposes of determining eligibility for improved death pension, effective December 10, 2004.

An award of death pension is effective the first day of the month in which the veteran died if the claim is received within one year from the date of death, effective December 10, 2004.

Specially adapted housing and automobile and adaptive equipment benefits are available to a veteran who is disabled by VA health care or vocational rehabilitation as though the disability were service connected, effective December 10, 2004.

Cancer of the bone, brain, colon, lung, and ovary are added to the statutory list of diseases that are presumed to have been incurred or aggravated in active service if manifested in a radiation-exposed veteran.

The definition of "radiation-risk activity" is extended to include service in a capacity which, if performed as a Department of Energy (DOE) employee, would qualify the individual as a member of the Special Exposure Cohort as

defined for compensation purposes under the Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation Program Act of 2000.

**AGENT ORANGE IN KOREA** VA learned recently that the United Nations Command Security Battalion-Joint Security Area (UNCSB-JSA) was stationed at Camp Kitty Hawk in Korea. The soldiers belonged to the 8th Army, but were part of the United Nations Command Military Assistance Commission structure. The unit was permanently stationed near the DMZ and the unit's mission would have taken them into the DMZ. Exposure to Agent Orange is presumed for veterans assigned to the UNCSB-JSA during the period April 1968 through July 1969.

**VA REACHES OUT TO VETERANS EXPOSED TO MUSTARD AGENTS** (VA News Release March 17, 2005 WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) today announced a national outreach campaign to locate veterans who were exposed to mustard gas or the chemical weapon Lewisite during their service. This new effort includes direct mailings to veterans newly identified by the Department of Defense (DoD). VA launched an awareness campaign in 1993 about benefits for veterans exposed to chemical warfare materials. Most of these “mustard gas veterans” took part in DoD tests during World War II. They were exposed to mustard agents, which includes sulfur mustard and nitrogen mustard, and Lewisite, which is a blister-producing chemical that contains organic arsenic. The tests were designed to evaluate clothing, ointments and equipment that would protect American troops from mustard agent attacks. As part of those tests, DoD reported some participants were exposed to a drop of a chemical-warfare agent on an arm, while others had full-body exposure in test chambers, sometimes with limited protective clothing. According to DoD, approximately 4,500 service members were exposed to these agents.

VA is mailing information to the veterans and survivors within the first group of participants identified by DoD. The information covers VA medical and financial benefits, data about the effects of exposure to chemical warfare agents, and telephone numbers for VA and DoD offices involved in the outreach campaign. VA is continuing to seek addresses for additional veterans and survivors.

VA invites veterans to file disability compensation claims for any condition related to service, including exposure to mustard agents and Lewisite. Veterans or their survivors with questions about these benefits should contact VA at 1-800-749-8387 or visit VA's benefits Web site at [www.vba.va.gov](http://www.vba.va.gov).

#### **IMPORTANT DATES IN APRIL**

**April 1** payments for March due

**April 7** last day to input change of address or establish direct deposit on compensation and pension awards in time for the 04-29-2005 payments

**April 20** last day to change or cancel direct deposit on compensation and pension awards in time for the 04-29-2005 payments

**April 29** payments for April due

#### **VA FACILITIES ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS:**

**VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg** - PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731 **1-800-827-1000**

**Regional Processing Office, Atlanta, GA** (education claims) - PO Box 100022, Decatur, GA 30031-7022  
**1-888-GIBILL1 (442-4551)**  
Telephone number for Chapter 30 self-verifications  
**1-877-823-2378**

**Veterans Health Administration Toll-Free Hotline** (medical care) - **1-877-222-8387**

**VA EFT Information Hotline** (electronic funds transfer - direct deposit) **1-877-838-2778**

**VA Insurance Center, Philadelphia** (VA Insurance) - PO Box 42954, Philadelphia, PA 19101 **1-800-669-8477**

**VA Health Administration Center** (CHAMPVA and Spina Bifida health care) -  
CHAMPVA inquiries: PO Box 65023, Denver, CO 80206-5023  
CHAMPVA claims: PO Box 65024, Denver, CO 80206-5024  
Spina Bifida inquiries and claims: PO Box 65025, Denver, CO 80206-5025 **1-800-733-8387**

**Foreign Medical Program Office** (medical treatment abroad) -  
PO Box 65021, Denver, CO 80206-5021 **303-331-7590**

**National Cemeteries**  
10,000 Bay Pines Blvd N, Bay Pines FL **727-398-9426**  
6502 SW 102nd Ave, Bushnell FL 33513 **352-793-7740**  
Naval Air Station, Pensacola FL **850-453-4108/4846**

**National Cemetery Administration Office of Memorial Programs** (headstones and markers) - 810 Vermont Ave NW, Washington, DC 20420 **1-800-697-6947**

**Loan Guaranty Eligibility Center** (certificates of eligibility)  
PO Box 20729, Winston-Salem, NC 27120  
**1-888-244-6711**

**Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) Unit** -  
Chicago VA Regional Office **1-800-829-4833**

#### **INTERNET SITES OF INTEREST:**

VA Web Site: [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)

VA Web Automated Reference Materials System (WARMS)  
<http://www.warms.vba.va.gov/>

Property Management [www.ocwen.com](http://www.ocwen.com)

Florida Department of Veterans Affairs:  
[www.floridavets.org/](http://www.floridavets.org/)

St. Pete Regional Office: [www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete](http://www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete)

